Queer Freaks of Searles, Who Married Mark Hopkins's Millions.

Startling Eccentricities of the Poor House Decorator Who Won the Aged Widow of Mark Hopkins, Fell Heir to the Vast Estate and Has Become a Hermit in a Stone Fortress.

EDWARD F. SEARLES, who acquired the many millions of Mark Hopkins by marrying his 70-year-old widow, shows symptoms of eccentricity bordering upon insanity.

He buried his wife at midnight with a torchlight procession in a grave which he had just completed for her.

He believes that he is "Lord" Searles, and requires his servants to treat him accordingly.

He has surrounded his house at Methuen, Mass., with fortifications.

He sits for hours under a tower, whose bells he says ring according to his mood.

METHUEN, Mass., June 30.—Edward F. Searles, who married Mrs. Mark Hopkins and inherited her $30,000,000, has bewildered this place by his queer freaks.

Searles, who was an artistic house decorator, created a national sensation when he married Mrs. Hopkins, the septuagenarian widow of the Southern Pacific Railroad magnate. When he first obtained control of her wealth Searles attracted attention by his eccentricities in building and spending money. Since her death they have taken other forms.

Searles now has the delusion that he is a real live lord. He imagines himself to be "Lord Searles, of Methuen," and requires his army of servants and workmen to greet him accordingly.

He requires them to address him as "My lord," to remove their hats in his presence and to bow as he passes by. None of them may remain seated before him. He believes himself to be an actual member of the British peerage.

The eccentricities of Mr. Searles have become more and more pronounced during the past two years. The most extraordinary of all of them, however, was perpetrated at the burial of his wife.

Mrs. Searles's death, on July 25, 1891, was mysterious. It is said that the ravages of the grip sapped her vitality. When her death occurred the reporters who sought information at the gates were turned away. Those among the Methuen folk who were fairly well acquainted with the deceased and who called to offer condolences were met by barred gates.

Before the funeral service was read the cause of death was changed from grip to dropsy.

Mrs. Searles had been at Great Barrington earlier in the season and her husband brought her to Methuen just two weeks prior to her death.

The funeral was strictly private. The Rev. Charles F. Sweet, rector of St. Thomas's Church, at Methuen, conducted the funeral services, and was assisted by the Rev. C. H. Oliphant, Congregationalist, who read the responses.

Charles Hopkins, of Brooklyn, a brother of the deceased woman's first husband, attended the service. He stopped at a hotel at Lawrence and rode up in time for the funeral, after which he returned to the hotel until train time.

There were only eleven persons present at the services, including the bereaved husband, the clergymen and the undertaker. The service lasted forty minutes, and the last visitor had departed from the presence of the dead at 12 o'clock noon.

At midnight four of Searles's workmen, dressed as liveried flunkies, bore the casket containing everything mortal of Mrs. Searles to its last resting place in the old Methuen Cemetery, across the road from the Searles house.

Few Methuen folk saw the funeral procession. Indeed the number may be narrowed down to five persons, one of whom was a woman. They did not see the procession move from the house, but they saw it issue from the gate, they saw it cross the road and wend its way down the grass-grown path to the entrance and watched the weird group move slowly through the cemetery, avoiding the other tombstones, to the grave which had been prepared for Mrs. Searles.

The procession to the tomb was headed by Mr. Searles, whose white hair and curiously pale complexion were strikingly reflected by a torch which he carried to light the way.

Strange to say, the tomb had been finished just five days prior to the death of Mrs. Searles. And it is the only thing which Mr. Searles has been known to finish during his control of the fortune.

On that night, when those five awed and amazed persons saw that procession move before them, the town clock, after performing its duty of striking the midnight hour, stopped, and it has never started since then. Probably no person is courageous enough to wind it.

The mortuary receptacle in which Mrs. Searles's remains lie is about twenty-five feet long by twenty feet wide and twenty feet high in the centre, with a sloping roof covered with red slate. The door opens to the east, and the entrance is made down a flight of six broad granite steps, where open doors of fine ironwork allow a view of the interior.

Mrs. Searles, in a rosewood coffin with a glass top, rests upon the centre niche in the front row.

Soon after the obsequies Searles began to do other strange things. By his late wife's will he received everything. Young Timothy Hopkins, an adopted son, contested the will on the ground that Searles used undue measures to warp his aged wife's judgment. The case was fought at Newburyport, Mass., and Searles subsequently settled it out of court because of the newspaper notoriety he was receiving. He paid young Timothy, who formerly was Pat Nolan, $3,000,000, and the latter promised to leave Searles in peace and return to the Pacific coast.

Searles never seems to be satisfied with anything his fertile brain conceives, and no sooner does he get a project under way than he directs a suspension. Even the house he lives in—his birthplace—is unfinished. He has spent hundreds of thousands on it, yet above the stone fortress which surrounds it can be seen unfinished patches where tar paper, becoming weather-beaten, rattles like dry bones whenever the wind sweeps under it.

Five years ago he commenced the construction of a block stone wall around his grounds. As the work progressed he became dissatisfied and began again on a larger scale. He caused an addition seven feet high to be built upon the top of the first wall. He has since added layer upon layer, until now the wall, fortress in fact, is in some places over forty feet in height and still unfinished.

About four years ago he purchased Sculptor Thomas Ball's masterpiece, a statue of Washington, which the veteran sculptor made at Florence.

Searles paid $125,000 and an additional $75,000 for the statues of Lincoln, Grant, Sherman and Sheridan, which are put upon the four corners of the pedestal base.

The monument is set across the street from the Searles estate, and is shrouded in canvas and wood. There it has stood for over two years, and, in the opinion of the Methuenites, it will remain so as long as Searles lives.

A handful of Italian laborers daily work about the base, grading and trenching. One day Searles will drive out from his castle, accompanied by a stout coachman, and direct that the workmen place so many shovelfuls of dirt on such and such a place, and the next day he will visit them and order the dirt removed.

Meanwhile the statue stands in shrouded grandeur upon its unfinished ground, and Thomas Ball sits in his cottage at Montclair, N. J., chafing with all the querulousness of eighty years, because his work is not unveiled to the world. The sculptor hopes to live long enough to witness the unveiling—but "Lord" Searles is very eccentric.

Thousands of words would be insufficient to describe the multitudinous schemes Searles has undertaken and left unfinished. Three years ago he promised to build a high school building for the town of Methuen. The plans were drafted and the specifications represented a cost of $200,000. The inhabitants of the town were pleased. They asked the donor where he inteaded it should be located; he replied that it made no difference to them where it would be. It is not built yet, and probably it never will be, if its construction is left in "Lord" Searles's control.

He asked the town authorities to give him the right to beautify the old cemetery in which the Searles tomb is built. The request was granted, and the eccentric millionaire remodelled and renovated the field of the dead. Then he had a huge stone arch built at the entrance, heavy gates hung and doubly padlocked. Even the descendants of the dead are barred from entering the enclosure to strew flowers on the graves of their relatives. The people permit the act of lawlessness because they fear the power of his wealth.

Of course, they are indignant, and say all sorts of things against "Lord" Searles who, in turn, bitterly reviled the settlement of what he terms "an ungrateful populace."

He frequently drives about the town, always accompanied by his coachman or private secretary, A. C. Bell, formerly a New York attorney, who transacts all the details of the business growing out of his peculiar employer's mind. Mr. Bell, it is said, never contradicts "Lord" Searles's statements or attempts to controvert his ideas, but simply humors him in all his eccentricities. This is deemed the best plan so long as the money lasts, because Searles is a man of violent temper that has not decreased with the increase of mental infirmity.

While the army of servants and detectives surrounding Searles concede all the subserviency necessary for a person of Searles's temperament, the people of Methuen refused to recognize the title of "lord." The absence of recognition preys on Searles's mind and he hates them accordingly. He doesn't recognize any of his old schoolmates and neighbors—merely passes them by without betraying by a sign that he ever saw them before. His face has assumed a habitual expression of superciliousness.

He sits for hours at a time in the "Tower of Chimes," which rises above one corner of his unfinished manor. The tower is 190 feet high, and on the hour and half-hour, day and night, chiming bells ring out.

He, it is said, told a person in one of his fits of cordiality that the chimes reflected the condition of his temperament.

When, he said, his mind is gloomy, the bells strike a minor chord; when his mind is stirred by tempestuous thoughts the bells ring out defiantly, and when in repose they reflect his peace by chiming the music of rest.

Searles is an enthusiastic lover of music and is a talented organist. He purchased for $15,000 the big organ which was too large for the Music Hall in Boston, and began to build a house for it at Methuen. The house is still unfinished, and the organ, in pieces, filling thirteen cars, stands on a side track in the railroad yard. Searles also started an organ factory for the purpose of constructing organs after his own design. There are plenty of designs, but no organs have been completed in the three years of the factory's life.

No person is permitted to enter his estate gates nor any land which is his. He employs a large corps of detectives, who are scattered all over his properties, and a trespasser is instantly surrounded and speedily escorted off the grounds.

It is estimated that Searles is spending over $2,000,000 annually in perpetuating his fads, the result of "constructive mania."

Besides the original Searles property he has bought all the farms surrounding "World's End Pond," a greater part of which lies in Salem, N. H. The total acreage is about 2,000, and it is said that Searles intends making a park of it on the plan of Millionaire Corbin's in northwestern New Hampshire. There are hundreds of Italian laborers on the Stillwater farm removing the farm houses and changing the scenery in conformity with Searles's ideas.

The only building erected on this property so far is a lodge at the gate entrance. In parallel lines with the plan of the magnificent fortress at Methuen, he is causing a stone wall to be built around his property surrounding World's End Pond.

At Methuen "Lord" Searles proposes to stay. Immured behind giant walls, protected by the massive iron gates which swing to and fro only when their master passes through; secure beneath the frowning "Tower of Chimes," and surrounded by a body guard of paid detectives, who will fight for him so long as his money pays them, he is secure from invasion by the authorities. His great wealth is the basis upon which his security rests. He can laugh in maniacal glee at any attempt to apprehend him.

Two years ago during the visit of a party of English tourists he raised the British flag to the top of the flag staff surmounting the "Tower of Chimes." This action excited intense wrath within the breasts of some citizens of Methuen.

Searles was born of poor parents at Methuen over fifty years ago. When he met Mrs. Hopkins he was engaged in decorating the interior of the Hopkins palace on "Nob Hill," San Francisco. She was then the richest woman in the United States. His knowledge of decorating attracted and pleased her. His knowledge of her wealth fascinated him. Their acquaintance began there and then. For three years prior to the marriage he literally rolled in wealth.

The widowed mother of Seales mortgaged her home in Methuen to raise funds to send her son Edward to a training school. The mortgage remained unpaid until after he decorated the Hopkins mansion at San Francisco.

Mark Hopkins, the founder of the Searles millions, was born in Great Barrington, Mass., in 1810. He went to California by way of Cape Horn in 1849, and soon after his arrival there he started in the hardware business at Sacramento with Collis P. Huntington.

In 1859 Hopkins, Stanford, Huntington and the three Crockers began working up their great scheme of transcontinental railroading. They all acquired vast fortunes.

Hopkins died in 1878, leaving no will and his wife childless and the possessor of over $30,000,000.

Mark Hopkins was noted for his frugality; the widow soon won fame for her prodigality. Besides winning the latter fame she won Searles.

She started to build the grandest house on the Pacific Coast. When it was finished over $1,000,000 had been spent, and the Stewart house, in New York, alone could challenge comparison with it.

Then she turned her attention to Great Barrington, where, it is claimed, she was born. Searles designed a structure that suited her fancy, and she caused the plans to be carried out. The mansion, nestling in the Berkshires, outclassed all private residences of the period. Its cost is estimated at $5,200,000.

It was during the construction of the Great Barrington house that the Hopkins-Searles marriage took place, on November 8, 1887. Mrs. Hopkins was seventy-one years old when she married Searles. He was under fifty. When she died, July 25, 1891, she left everything to Searles by her will. He became possessor of a vast accumulation of cash, the $1,000,000 house on "Nob" Hill, the $3,000,000 palace in the Berkshires, a costly Summer house on Block Island, and a fine house in Paris.

Searles began life as an apprentice to a carpenter in Lawrence, Mass., when that city began to grow.

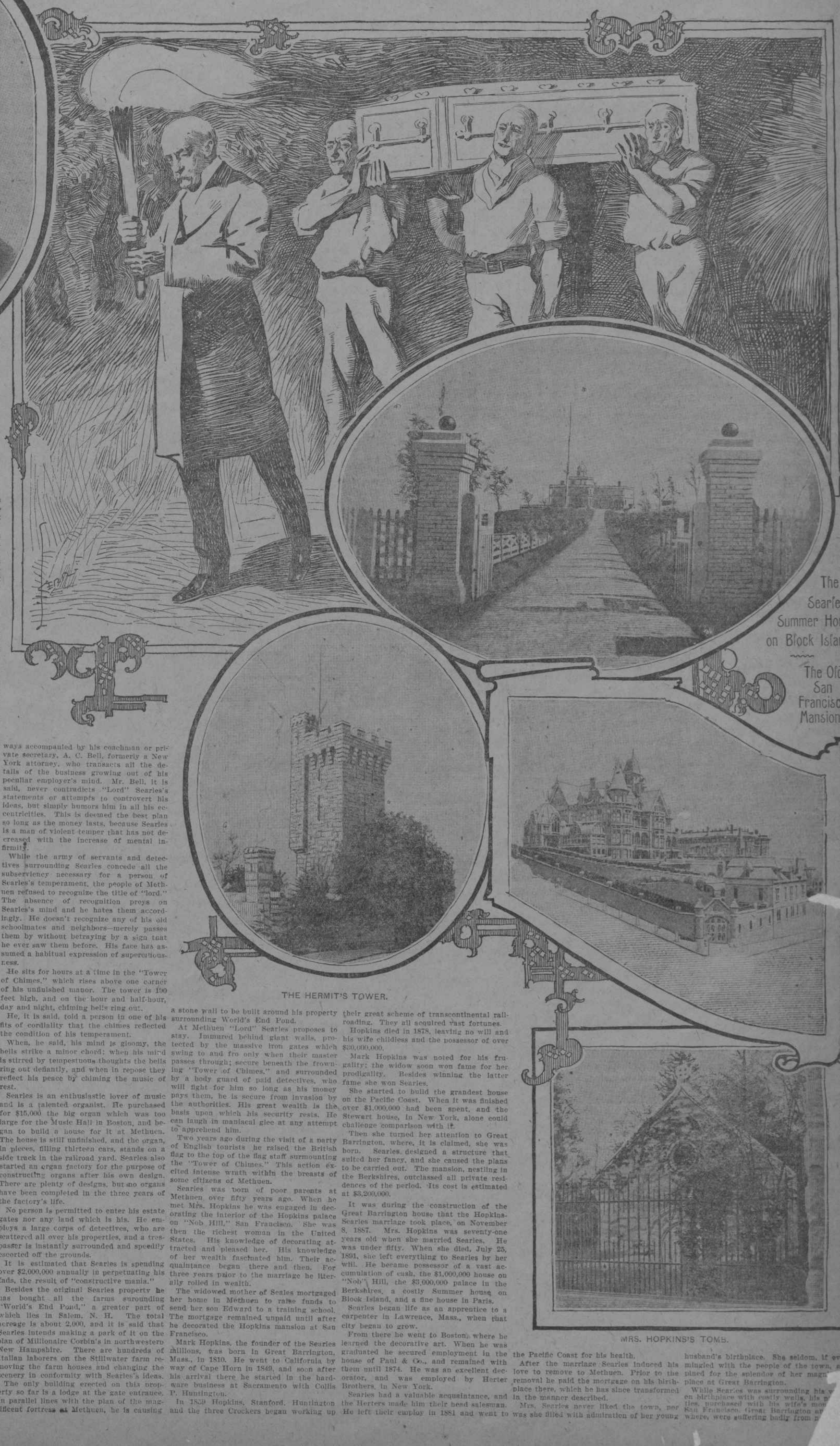
From there he went to Boston, where he learned the decorative art. When he was graduated he secured employment in the house of Paul & Co., and remained with them until 1874. He was an excellent decorator, and was employed by Herter Brothers, in New York.

Searles had a valuable acquaintance, and the Herters made him their head salesman. He left their employ in 1881 and went to the Pacific Coast for his health.

After the marriage Searles induced his love to remove to Methuen. Prior to the removal he paid the mortgage on his birthplace there, which he has since transformed in the manner described.

Mrs. Searles never liked the town, nor was she filled with admiration of her young husband's birthplace. She seldom, if ever, mingled with the people of the town, and pined for the splendor of her magnificent birthplace at Great Barrington.

While Searles was surrounding his own birthplace with costly walls, his palatial residences, purchased with his wife's money in San Francisco, Great Barrington and elsewhere, were suffering badly from neglect.



THE HERMIT'S TOWER.

The Searles Summer Home on Block Island.

The Old San Francisco Mansion.

MRS. HOPKINS'S TOMB.